

Waiting for Oedipus

David Doyle

As the scene becomes illuminated we begin to make out a cross-roads just before dusk. An old man sits at the side of the road looking tired and punished by the long journey he has made to come to this place. He is wearing the apparel of a traveler and is unattended.

I am waiting for Oedipus. I've been waiting for him all my life now. Ever since I sent him away as a child I have been waiting for him. Like the man who awaits his son after the first time he leaves home alone, hoping and fearing that he has become a man. My wife, Jocasta, said I was mad to give him to that shepherd; she wanted me to kill him there and then after we received that hateful message from the gods. I suppose she was right. But how could I kill my own son? My own flesh and blood? What a mess we've made of this world when we must kill our own infants to save ourselves from the wrath of the gods. Perhaps that would have been the kindest thing to do in order to spare him the misery that is to come.

He resembles an old warrior, once immortal and indefinitely young, whose great deeds no longer stand by him to offer him support in his premature old age. The anxiety almost radiates from his wrinkle-scarred brow but nonetheless he gives off an aura of knowing that his torture will finally be at an end.

Murder then marriage....

The silence seems less terrible in the dark somehow. At least that will be some comfort to him when the time comes. Not for me though. I can already see what is coming; that's my torture. While his is blindness, mine is sight. Ignorance and knowledge, the two most cursed and destructive weapons of the gods, in my case at least: of course they have others. As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, they kill us for their sport. *[He laughs quietly to himself.]* Perhaps I should have been a poet rather than a king; then at least I might have had some chance of a quiet life. Yes, that would have been very nice, to live in some cosy little slum in the back streets of Thebes left alone to write about the, pleasures of an ordinary life. But what did fate make me? A king. That's a laugh. What use of being a king in a world ruled by prophecies and myths? I don't see the point of even living in a world where the words of invisible gods dictate the lives of men; let alone being a king in one.

He looks at each of the four intersecting roads around him in turn. He is standing in the middle of the crossroads and realizes that there is no escape.

As I stand here he rushing to a destiny he will be forced to relive forever and that time will never forget.

Defeated again he slumps back to his former position by the side of the road.

I wonder what became of him.

Pause.

The nature of his courage will be his undoing just as my lack of it when faced with that spiteful augury was my own downfall. The hero does not ask questions he merely acts. I used to be like him; full of endeavour and courage but the gods saw to that. (Sorrowful.) That is his role in this little show for the amusement of the divine; 'The Hero' of the tale.

He looks around again noticing the irony of his surroundings

for the first time. He cannot help but be amazed at the trouble they have gone to in setting this particular scene.

Wait, I think I see him. Yes, I can see him coming just over that hill. He sits so tall and handsome in the saddle just like his father used to. Ah! He has the appearance of a prince! So regal and majestic. He looks like a ruler, like a tyrant! Yes, he will make a good king... just like his father. They won't be able to deny him that!

Moving into position in the middle of the road he turns to face the sinister side of the stage.

I'd better get into character; I have my part to play in this as well, whether I like it or not. 'The evil father'; that is how history will remember me. Just an obstruction in the middle of the road for our hero to sweep aside with his reckless sword. Not the hardest of roles to act out, but perhaps one of the more difficult parts of this little farce. I just hope he makes it swift. I don't want to talk to him for long, I might give the game up and spoil the surprise for him.

The sound of a horse galloping far off in the distance gradually gets louder and louder like the sound of the past catching up with the present. Laius continues to ready himself as if trying to hastily revise his lines just before his entrance on stage on the opening night of his very first play.

David Doyle is a pupil at the European School in Brussels.